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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 007281

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [VZ](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: GOC-GOV TENSIONS EMERGE AS HUMANITARIAN EXCHANGE
PROCESS IS DELAYED

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) President Chavez urged the GOC to facilitate, not block, GOV efforts to meet with FARC leaders in Venezuela. The GOC responded by warning the international community not to "fall for the deception of terrorism." Long-time FARC intermediary Alvaro Leyva said Uribe's decision to involve Chavez was a mistake that would help "Chavistas" in Colombia's October local elections. He claimed Chavez has forced Uribe to repeatedly expand his list of non-negotiable conditions, thereby making Uribe appear as the obstacle to a deal in the eyes of many Europeans. END SUMMARY.

CHAVEZ: GIVE FARC A PLANE AND COFFEE

12. (U) During his weekly "Alo Presidente" show on October 7, Venezuelan President Chavez said the GOC "should facilitate, not block" his humanitarian exchange efforts. Chavez suggested that President Uribe provide FARC leader Manuel Marulanda with a GOC aircraft to travel to Venezuela for talks. Chavez said, "Marulanda: I am waiting for you on the border, but Uribe you have to help me. Uribe, give him a plane, and put him on the border where I will be with coffee and everything." Exchange facilitator Senator Piedad Cordoba announced on October 8 that she expects a Chavez-FARC meeting to be delayed by at least a month.

GOC'S REMINDER: FARC = TERRORIST

13. (U) The GOC responded to Chavez with a statement from the presidential palace urging the international community "not to fall for the deception of terrorism." Vice President Santos told the press Chavez and the other facilitators should show "prudence." He pointed out that FARC terrorists are responsible for the murder of "an infinite number of Colombians" and should not be "received with a nice coffee"

by Colombia's neighbors. GOC Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo traveled to Caracas October 7 to lay the groundwork for the Uribe-Chavez meeting in La Guajira on October 12.

LEYVA EXPECTS CHAVEZ FAILURE

¶4. (C) Former minister and (now) sidelined FARC intermediary Alvaro Leyva told us October 6 that Uribe's involvement with Chavez was a huge mistake. Uribe believed he could control Chavez by publicly outlining his "non-negotiable" points ("inamovibles"). If the FARC released the hostages on Uribe's terms, he would be the winner. If the effort failed, he could blame Chavez and the FARC. Leyva said Uribe had underestimated Chavez, who has repeatedly forced Uribe to expand his list of non-negotiable items, thereby casting him as the obstacle to a deal. He said Uribe's statement rejecting the return of "Sonia" and "Simon Trinidad" was an error. Uribe should have left the issue to the USG.

¶5. (C) Leyva claimed Chavez no longer believed a humanitarian exchange is possible. Instead, Chavez' goal is to ensure Uribe takes the blame for the failed facilitation effort, not hard given Uribe's growing number of "inamovibles." He claimed the Spaniards, French and Swiss feel poorly treated by the GOC for their facilitation efforts, and will be inclined to blame Uribe for any failure. Many Europeans already think Uribe does not want an exchange. The collapse of the facilitation effort will strengthen Chavez who has used it to build a personal relationship with French President Sarkozy. Leyva said the local perception is that even the USG has moved closer to Venezuela because of Chavez' facilitation effort.

PERSPECTIVE ON FARC

¶6. (C) The FARC would be happy with a collapse of the exchange process, Leyva said, especially if Uribe received the blame. He was skeptical the FARC would meet with Chavez in Caracas, asserting that the FARC does not trust the Venezuelan President. For that matter, "they don't trust their own shadows." The FARC were willing to exploit Chavez' initiative to gain political space, but never felt comfortable with the process. Leftist columnist Leon Valencia agreed the FARC leaders were unlikely to meet outside of Colombia. FARC leaders do not think in geo-political terms, and are focused on their personal security and fighting the GOC.

BOOST FOR CHAVISTAS IN COLOMBIA

¶7. (C) Leyva claimed Uribe's acceptance of Chavez as mediator has given an important boost to Chavez' supporters in Colombia in the run up to October local elections. He expects Chavez' sympathizers to do well in small municipalities, especially in the North Coast and border departments. This is dangerous because it advances Chavez' "bottom-up" approach to building a political movement in Colombia.